

The 9-Hour Rule: Controllers are required to have a minimum of nine hours off-duty preceding the start of a day shift

What is the point of the 9-hour turn before a day shift?

The goal is to improve safety by increasing nighttime sleep opportunities for operational controllers. Because night time sleep is the most restorative sleep, any change which allows controllers to get more night time sleep should reduce fatigue risk.

Why 9 hours?

Increasing the turn provides an extra hour of night time sleep opportunity. Bio-mathematical fatigue modeling has demonstrated that the benefits of this extra sleep include enhanced performance during the following day as well as improved to performance on subsequent midnight shifts.

How does it work?

- It applies to all facilities whether or not they are 24-hour operations.
- It applies before day shifts only. For purposes of this mitigation only, a day shift is generally defined as a schedule where the majority of hours fall between 0700-1600.
- The 9-hour turn applies to all shift changes, swaps and overtime to include scheduled, call-in and holdover assignments.
- When the upcoming shift is an operational shift. Use of leave, excused absence or administrative time/duties during a shift do not satisfy the 9-hour off-duty requirement.

Myth: This schedule policy is just a knee-jerk reaction.

Fact: FAA Management and NATCA considered and recommended this mitigation prior to media attention. The recommendation was based on science and formulated by a collaborative group of fatigue scientists, FAA Management and NATCA representatives.

Myth: If 9 hours before a day shift improves cognitive (mental) function, then there should be 9 hours before all shifts, such as between the day and mid shift on a 2-2-1 schedule.

Fact: Nine hours between a day and midnight shift does not increase nighttime sleep opportunity; in fact, that would lessen nighttime sleep opportunity as the day shift would have to be earlier, thus giving less night time sleep opportunity before the day that precedes a mid shift. Studies show that given an extra hour of daytime sleep opportunity (such as between a day and midnight shift), most individuals do not use that extra hour for sleep.